

SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

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SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Gallery of seasonal delights** Find out the winners of our annual photo competition and how you can get involved to crown the “People’s Choice” champion.
- **Have your say!** Our Local Plan Review launches this month and we want your feedback!
- **MBE** Learn about a man whose dedication to the South Downs has earned him a top honour.
- **Win a FREE gourmet lunch!** Dine in one of the region’s best restaurants, the PIG.

As always, please send your comments and ideas to us at newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk

Seasonal splendours of the South Downs

Two of Britain’s most iconic birds, a majestic wintry river and the joy of springtime wild garlic in an ancient English woodland are among the winners of the National Park’s Annual Photo Competition.

Photographer Piers Fearick was a double winner, taking both the first and runner-up prize in the National Park’s ever-popular wildlife category by capturing the beauty of a yellowhammer and wren in the South Downs.

The theme for the main competition was “Stunning Seasons of the South Downs” and judges were treated to an incredible assortment of images showing off the changing landscape, treescape, weather and light conditions throughout the year.

This year saw a record number of entries, with over 800 photographs.

The competition judges were award-winning photographers Rachael Talibart, Finn Hopson, and Carlotta Luke, *Outdoor Photography* Deputy Editor Claire Blow,



the National Park’s Biodiversity Officer Jan Knowlson, as well as Vanessa Rowlands, Chair of the National Park Authority.

The wildlife category, which was wide open and not tied to the seasons, was one of the highest standards ever in the history of the competition.

About the yellowhammer, Jan said: “It’s one of our great farmland birds in the South Downs that has struggled in recent decades, so it’s wonderful to see the yellowhammer being shown here in all its glory.”

Regarding the wren image, named “Tiny Bit Tough”, Rachael said: “It’s so beautiful and one of our most characterful birds. I love the detail and how they have even captured a cobweb on the wren’s beak!”

Vanessa added: “These are truly beautiful birds and it would be a travesty if we lost these species from our

countryside. It underlines why nature recovery is so important."

Photographer Piers, who lives near Worthing and wins £150, said: "I'm constantly inspired by the natural environment and in particular the South Downs National Park which I'm very lucky to have on my doorstep. Yellowhammer, with its vibrant plumage, is only intensified with a backdrop of flowering golden gorse."



There was another double winner with Stuart East, who took the first-place prize for both the spring and winter categories.

His composition of wild garlic beneath ancient trees at Treyford impressed judges, while his photograph of a hoar frost on the River Arun wowed judges for its technical prowess.

Finn said: "This is a very accomplished photograph and a lot of thought has gone into it. It really shows off the joy of spring in our woodlands."

Regarding the hoar frost at Houghton, Carlotta said: "I love the still water and the reflection. The colours are lovely and it's a beautiful light."

Stuart, who lives at Littlehampton and picks up a £200 prize, said: "I'm absolutely delighted. I spend a lot of my spare time walking, cycling and photographing in the South Downs National Park. I really enjoy observing and capturing the changing seasons across the different habitats and landscapes we are lucky to have so close by."

Taking the top spot for summer was a dreamy photography, "Poppies and Puffy Clouds", taken by Ian Brierley and showing off the stunning view from Beeding Hill.



Carlotta said: "The composition of all the fields are amazing with the sea in the distance. This is so unmistakably South Downs."

Photographer Ian, who lives near Haywards Heath and picks up a prize of £100, said: "The whole scene seemed to sum up what I love about the South Downs, the endless views, rolling hills, and the feeling of being lost in the tranquility and beauty surrounded by nature."

In the autumn category, a misty scene of a cyclist passing through a golden treescape captured the hearts of the judges and wins Emma Varley a £100 prize.

Rachael added: "It's so atmospheric and great timing for the photographer to capture this moment. I like the way the branch is coming across to frame the photo."

Emma, who lives at Steyning, said: "I took the photo en route to visit family in Pulborough one gorgeous, misty October morning.

"Luckily, a cyclist was also enjoying the scenery and I managed to include him too.



"Living on a farm near Washington for many years, it was the beauty of the South Downs and its wildlife that inspired me to take up photography."

This year's competition included a "Towns and Villages" category to celebrate the many vibrant communities of the National Park. Winning the category was an image capturing the "The Harting Festivities", a village celebration that is some two centuries old. The photograph was taken by Chris Gorman, who wins £100.

Claire said: "This is such a well-composed photograph that shows off so many different elements of the South Downs National Park. It shows off a bustling community and is really alive as an image."



Chris said: "As a drone photographer based near Petersfield, the South Downs National park provides a huge amount of scope

for great images from the vibrant villages as seen in my image, to beautiful sunrises and misty mornings."

The judges awarded a runner-up prize in the winter category given the high standard. "Angelic Tree" wins Richard Murray, of Waterlooville, a £50 prize.

A number of photographs were highly commended by the judges: "Symphony of Speed" by Melanie Randell;

"Hummingbird Hawkmoth" by Nigel Picknell; "Snail" by T Moore; "Blue on Heather" by Emma Varley;

"Early Orchid" by Jen Fellows; "Fire and Ice" by Chris Gorman; "Cow Parsley Ponies" by Lynsey Main; "Over the Rainbow" by Jamie Fielding; "Common Heather" by Piers Fearick; "Summertime" by Julia Vasylevska; "Autumn Mists Around Vandalian Tower" by Mark Jones; "Breaking Sun In The Mist" by Giles Smith; "Swanborough Hill" by Ian Brierley; "Peaceful Reflections" by Carly Waymark; and "Alfriston Under Flower Moon" by Lee Rouse.



All the winning and commended images, as well as other shortlisted images, will now be put forward to the People's Choice, with the winner taking a £75 prize. The online poll closes at midnight on 31 January.

[Cast your vote here.](#)

Have your say on future of the National Park



An eight-week consultation begins this month as the National Park invites people to have their say on how and where development takes place.

The award-winning South Downs Local Plan is being reviewed to ensure it's up-to-date and addresses important issues such as nature recovery, climate change, affordable housing and helping local communities thrive.

The public consultation of the Local Plan Review starts on 20 January and will run until 17 March. This is the main opportunity for people to help shape the final Plan, so the National Park is encouraging the public to get involved.

Local Plans set out where future development will take place, such as new homes and locations for business growth, as well as key policies, such as protecting nature and heritage, against which future planning applications will be judged.

The National Park Authority proposes to keep much of the existing Local Plan, including the emphasis on landscaped, which means that the nationally-designated landscape is considered in every planning decision. The Local Plan will continue to prioritise the provision of clean air, water, dark skies and food and a medium level of growth spread across the towns and villages of the UK's youngest National Park.

The Local Plan Review document contains 55 existing policies that have been updated, as well as 10 new, thematic policies. Changes include strengthening climate, nature and green infrastructure policies, greater protection for water resources, and more policies around viticulture and regenerative tourism given their importance for the South Downs economy. Some 28 existing Local Plan site allocations that have not yet been implemented would be carried over into the Local Plan Review, some with changes to wording or site areas, while there are 48 new proposed site allocations across Hampshire, West Sussex and East Sussex.

The National Park Authority is now inviting comments from local communities, stakeholders and the development sector. This feedback will then help shape

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the next version of the Local Plan, which will be published in 2026 ahead of its submission for examination by an independent Inspector. Once the new Local Plan is adopted in 2027, it will be used to help decide all planning applications in the National Park.

Tim Slaney, Director at the National Park Authority, said: "Planning is the beating heart of the National Park, deciding where development takes place and how we conserve and enhance its amazing landscape, wildlife and heritage.

"This is not an entirely new Local Plan and we would like to keep many of the existing policies that are working well. We need to ensure the Plan remains up-to-date and delivers on our priorities of nature recovery, climate action and a 'National Park for All'. As part of the review, we will also be incorporating policies around the future of Shoreham Cement Works.

"The Local Plan Review is still in its early stages and no decisions have been made. This consultation is a really key opportunity for people to influence what happens next and we're looking forward to hearing people's comments."

You can find out more at one of the Local Plan Review drop-in events at:

- **Midhurst** – Wednesday, 22 January between 6.30pm and 8.30pm at the South Downs Centre Memorial Hall, North Street, GU29 9DH
- **Twyford** – Saturday, 25 January between 2pm and 5pm at Twyford Village Hall, Hazeley Road, Twyford, Winchester SO21 1QY
- **Amberley** – Tuesday, 28 January between 3.30pm and 7.30pm. Amberley Church Hall, St Michael's Amberley, Church Street, Amberley, Arundel BN18 9ND.
- **Petersfield** – Wednesday, 29 January between 6.30pm and 8.30pm at Festival Hall, Heath Road, GU31 4EA
- **Liphook** – Saturday, 1 February between 2pm and 5pm at Liphook Church Centre, Portsmouth Road, GU30 7DJ.
- **Lewes** – Wednesday, 5 February between 6.30pm and 8.30pm at Lewes Town Hall, High Street, BN7 2QS and Saturday, 15 February 1.30-4pm at Cliffe Hall, 28 Cliffe High Street, BN7 2AH
- **Petworth** – Wednesday, 12 February between 3.30pm and 7.30pm at Leconfield Hall, Market Square, Petworth, GU28 0AH.



[To get involved visit our Local Plan Review web hub.](#)

This is a Draft Local Plan on which the Authority is seeking views. It will be subject to revisions as the Authority moves through the process. However, at present the Plan would provide approximately 4,500 new homes to 2042.

Dark Skies Festival is back!



#EMBRACETHEDARKNESS
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Dark Skies Festival 2025

Monday 13 February - Thursday 23 February

Key Event Dates

Saturday 15 February, 6pm-8.30pm
Walk the Planets & Star Party at Seven Sisters Country Park.

Sunday 16 February, 6.30pm-8.30pm
Star Party at Goodwood Country Park.

Tuesday 18 February, 6pm-8.30pm
Walk the Planets & Star Party at Alice Holt.

Thursday 20 February, 6pm-8.30pm
Walk the Planets & Star Party at Queen Elizabeth Country Park.

Saturday 22 February, 5.30pm-8.30pm
Star Party on Brighton Seafront.

southdowns.gov.uk/darkskies

Look out for the full programme of events on our website!

It's nearly time to embrace the darkness!

Our ever-popular Dark Skies Festival returns next month, with 11 days of events and activities celebrating the dark skies of the South Downs and the amazing nocturnal wildlife that lives here.

This year's theme is "glimmers" and we'll be celebrating the sparkling lights of stars, planets, meteors and moons in the night sky, the bioluminescence of glowworms and biofluorescence of other life, and linking this to becoming aware of those small, positive moments in our lives that encourage feelings of happiness, wonder and awe.

Here are some key dates for the diary and the full brochure with every event and activity will be coming out later this month. Some events have to be booked, while others you can just turn up!

Activities will include stargazing through large telescopes, talks, storytelling, a "Walk The Planets" trail, night walks and runs, craft activities, podcasts and lots more.



Please note that all in person events are subject to cancellation at short notice due to weather conditions. The full brochure will be available at www.southdowns.gov.uk/DarkSkiesFestival2025

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY It's National Dog Walking Month!



What better way to beat the January blues than to get out for some fresh air with your four-legged friends! Here in and around the South Downs National Park, we're encouraging you to get out with your pawesome pals and enjoy the countryside responsibly.

Some of the most popular dog walking sites are the stunning heathlands which cover just 1% of the National Park. A recent survey showed that more than three quarters of people visiting heathlands in the South Downs are dog walkers. Roughly 2,028 football pitches worth of this rarer than rainforest landscape belongs to the Ministry of Defence (MoD), which use it for military training activities. Having owned these sites for over 100 years, the MoD has ensured these species-rich heathland habitats remain in existence today.

How many of us have come home from a in the countryside only to find we've trodden in dog poo?

Take a moment to think of the people who work out in the countryside every day. Dog waste poses a hazard to many people working in the countryside, such as farmers out in the fields, rangers working to manage habitat and military troops training locally. Often soldiers will be on 10-day exercises, crawling on the ground and unable to change clothes.

On a recent survey conducted by the rangers at Longmoor Inclosure, near Petersfield, 72 dog poos were found within 200m of the main public access point onto the site, with an additional seven bagged dog poos left or hanging in branches.

Unlike poos from grazing herbivores, dog waste contains a parasite called Neospora. If ingested by livestock, Neospora can have a devastating impact on grazing cattle and sheep and their unborn young.

These parasites, along with several other types of harmful bacteria can also leech their way into our waterways, damaging the aquatic ecosystems and contaminating our own drinking water.

So how can you help? We're calling on everyone to do their bit, and not rely on the poo fairy!

While walking in the countryside please do clean up after your dog. If there are bins, please use them to bin your



dog waste, any public waste bin will do. What about if there aren't any? There are plenty of poo carrying solutions on the market now, and even just using an old plastic take-away box to store it in until you get home will do for a short journey.

Olivia French, Heathlands Engagement Lead

Funding of £2m for local community projects



Cycle path improvements, new toilets, a school extension, wildlife viewing platform and the restoration of a historic walled garden are among the community projects to benefit from a major funding boost from the South Downs National Park Authority.

To kick off 2025 the National Park is announcing 27 projects across Sussex and Hampshire that will receive a share of just over £1.9m. The funds have been raised through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), which is administered by the National Park Authority and paid by developers as a means of supporting new community infrastructure.

In addition to the £1.9m, 29 parish councils across the National Park are sharing more than £313,000 for the benefit of their local community.

In Hampshire, £75,000 will go towards access and toilet improvements at Petersfield Heath, as well as a further £30,000 to be spent on the installation of a Changing Places toilet at Queen Elizabeth Country Park. Meanwhile, £40,000 will go towards "Butser's butterflies" with extra funding to improve the precious chalk grassland for the insects. Selborne School will benefit from £100,000 for an extension to help improve after-school facilities. On the popular Meon Valley Trail, access will be improved with the addition of a new ramp at Soberton, thanks to a cash injection of £75,000. Some £30,000 will go towards the restoration of a walled garden at Chawton House which has long associations with Jane Austen and her family.

In West Sussex, over £720,000 will go towards the second phase of Centurion Way, which is providing a new link for walkers and cyclists from Chichester into the heart of the National Park at Cocking and linking up with the South Downs Way. Some £50,000 will go towards improving wetland and grazing habitats at RSPB Pulborough Brooks, while £20,000 has been allocated towards refurbishing Burpham Village Hall. At Northchapel, £20,000 will go towards installing a multi-use games area at the local sports club.

In East Sussex, £245,000 will help to upgrade a number of paths and infrastructure in the Lower Ouse Valley,

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improving links to train stations and local attractions. At Lewes Railway Land, a new wildlife viewing platform will be created at the Winterbourne Stream, thanks to £14,000 of funding, while £120,000 will go towards improving cycling facilities in the town. Some £30,000 has been awarded to help create a reedbed at Alfriston Clergy House to encourage wetland birds. Meanwhile, £50,000 has been allocated towards working with East Sussex County Council for a proposed signalled pedestrian crossing at Seven Sisters Country Park.

Vanessa Rowlands, Chair of the South Downs National Park Authority, said: "As we begin 2025 and enter the National Park's 15th year, it's wonderful to share this good news.

"There's a great mix of projects across the length and breadth of the National Park, many that will enrich the



quality of people's lives and help improve access to this cherished landscape, as well as tackling the biodiversity and climate crises.

"The Community Infrastructure Levy is an important element of our role as a planning authority and we know it can make a real difference to local communities, encouraging them to prosper and benefitting

future generations."

The Authority has now opened the call for projects for the 2025/2026 round of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding. Find out more [here](#).

CIL funding is designed to be spent on infrastructure to support growth within the National Park around the priorities of Nature Recovery, Climate Action and A National Park for All.

The full list of projects to benefit by county

Please note while funding is provided from the Community Infrastructure Levy, the schemes will primarily be delivered by partners and community groups and the CIL investment often only makes up a portion of the total cost of the project.

Hampshire

Selborne School – building extension to enable 'wrap around care'. £100,000

Winnall Moors Nature Reserve – replacement of existing boardwalks. £150,000

Petersfield Heath – access and toilet improvements. £75,000

Meon Valley Trail – access ramp at Soberton. £75,000

East Meon – byway upgrade. £50,000



Boosting Butser's Butterflies – restore and improve an area of priority habitat at Butser Hill Nature Reserve by re-establishing chalk grassland. £40,000

Trevor's MBE honour



Trevor Beattie, the long-serving former Chief Executive of the South Downs National Park Authority, is receiving an MBE for his services to the natural environment.

Trevor retired just over a year ago and was quite surprised to receive the good news that he was part of the New Year's Honours list.

At the helm of the National Park for 12 years, he led the way across many important projects, including increasing access to the National Park from urban areas with major infrastructure routes such as the Centurion Way and Egrets Way.

A lover of the South Downs landscape since his childhood days in rural West Sussex, Trevor was instrumental in forging a strong identity for the South Downs National Park as its operation grew from humble beginnings in 2010.

Trevor played a key role in the acquisition of Seven Sisters Country Park to ensure it remained in public ownership and was passionate about providing a warm welcome to visitors with our entry signage. Overseeing our innovative nature and climate work, ensuring thousands of young people can access the National Park, a protagonist for the South Downs' rich heritage, diversifying the National Park's income streams to help invest more in the environment, and being a strong advocate for affordable housing are among Trevor's other achievements – yet he remains as humble as ever.

Trevor, who lives in Hove, says: "I'm both surprised and very pleased to receive this award. It's recognition of all that has been achieved by the brilliant team at the South Downs National Park. I'm looking forward to my day at the Palace when I shall take every opportunity to emphasise the importance of National Parks - and to stress how much more still needs to be done."

Vanessa Rowlands, Chair of the National Park Authority, said: "This MBE is recognition of Trevor's outstanding contribution to the National Parks movement and our commitment to a better natural world that everyone can understand, appreciate and enjoy. These special places were designated for the nation and this was always front and centre of Trevor's thinking. He should be very proud of his achievements and this high honour is well-deserved."

Queen Elizabeth Country Park – installation of Changing Places Toilet and separate shower and changing block. £30,000

Chawton House – restoration of walled garden. £30,000

Rowlands Castle – highway and open spaces improvements. £15,000

Ballard Close, Twyford – wild outdoor education. £1,500

Cheriton – highway improvements. £20,000

The Green Room School, Kingsley – multi-purpose pod helping to deliver therapeutic needs. £5,500

West Sussex

Centurion Way Phase 2 – the route is currently being extended from West Dean to Cocking to link up with the 100-mile long South Downs Way National Trail. £724,508

RSPB Pulborough and Amberley –

improving wetland and grazing habitats as part of the "Downs to the Sea" project £50,000



Northchapel Sports Club – installation of multi-use games area. £20,000

Midhurst – revitalising Northern Gateway Project. £20,000

Burpham Village Hall – refurbishment to include air source heat pumps, LED lighting, bike stands and outdoor tap. £20,000

Hollycombe Primary School, Milland – tree planting. £4,000

Birchwood, Fittleworth – tree planting. £3,140

Petworth – installation of dropped kerbs in Market Square. £3,000

Stedham with Iping – improvements to parish, including local information. £3,000

East Sussex



Lower Ouse Valley – upgrades to a number of paths and infrastructure linking to train stations and attractions in the area. £245,000.00

Lewes – Improvements to Cycle Route R90. £120,000

Seven Sisters Country Park – towards working with East Sussex County Council for a proposed signalised pedestrian crossing. £50,000

Alfriston Clergy House – creation of reed bed. £38,000

Lewes Railway Land – viewing platform at Winterbourne Stream. £14,000

Falmer to Stanmer – improvements to visitor signage. £7,000

Community nature group really are the bee's knees!



A group of community volunteers have won two coveted awards for their stellar efforts to create much-needed habitat for wildlife.

The Friends of Blacknest Fields have been working hard over the past few years to improve eight acres of land in the parish of Binsted, Hampshire.

Two years ago an array of stunning wildflowers were sown, thanks to funding from the National Park's Bee Lines scheme, and last summer the site was buzzing with insect and bird life. The Western Rangers of the National Park have also been helping to guide the volunteers on their nature recovery endeavours, including the installation of a new pond, as well as support from a number of partner organisations.

Now the group have been recognised in the CPRE Countryside Awards, winning the "Protected Landscape Awards" and also the "People's Choice" award as voted for by the public.

Sarah Womersley, from the Blacknest Field group, said: "We are delighted to receive this award, it recognises all the huge community effort that has gone into the project. Blacknest Fields is such a special place and has brought the community together to care for it for future generations."



Volunteers have already recorded around 30 different species of butterfly and over 170 species of moth on the site.

Volunteer teams have also been busy planting hedgerows

and disease-resistant elm trees, and developing a dead hedge – all valuable homes, shelter and nectar sources for wildlife. There has been a huge push to get children involved in all aspects of the nature recovery work.

A solitary bee habitat mound has been created with the help of not-for-profit organisation Hive Helpers.

PIG's big donation helps pollinators bounce back



Bees and butterflies are being given a helping hand in the National Park thanks to the generosity of guests at a popular greenhouse restaurant.

Over the past two years, more than £16,000 has been donated to the South Downs Trust from the award-winning PIG restaurant, which is situated in the hamlet of Madehurst, near Arundel.

It comes after diners had the option of adding a £1 donation to their bill, while the business has also donated £4,000 from its own funds to help local wildlife.

All the funding has been poured into the National Park's Bee Lines initiative, which has so far created over 100 hectares – or 160 football pitches – of brand-new wildflower meadows to help pollinators thrive.

Olivia Dear, from the restaurant, said: "We love our bees, but they are not just useful for our Kitchen Gardens, humming and dipping from plant to plant, they are essential for helping preserve the ecological balance and biodiversity of nature. It is fantastic we can support bees, and many other important pollinators, beyond our grounds and gardens through the Bee Lines initiative."

The PIG, which also includes sumptuous rooms for overnight stays, prides itself on its amazing kitchen garden and anything it cannot grow is sourced from within a 25-mile radius.



We've teamed up with the PIG to offer a delicious midweek two-course lunch for two people (£28.50 excluding drinks) at the Madehurst restaurant. The lunch offer is available until the end of February.

People signing up to the newsletter during January will be automatically entered into the draw.

Those who are already signed up can email "homegrown" to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk before midnight on 31 January.

Sign up to the newsletter [here](#) and see competition T&Cs [here](#).

Things to do in the South Downs this January

Please follow the links as booking may be necessary. Find these and more events across the National Park and submit your own events at southdowns.gov.uk/events/



- Head to [Cowdray Farm Shop Café](#), Midhurst, on 25 January for the fourth in their series of “Evening Dining events” to enjoy a seasonal feast inspired by local ingredients. Each evening in our series will shine the spotlight on an ingredient that comes straight from Cowdray Estate with the January evening focusing on the estate’s beef. There will also be a delicious vegetarian menu to enjoy if you’d prefer.
- Watch a film about the harmony of farming and nature. In collaboration with Bedales, Petersfield Climate Action Network are hosting a screening of the soil health film *Six Inches of Soil*. The film will be shown in the school theatre, followed by a discussion with a panel of local experts. The event will run from 6.30pm to 9.30pm on 28, January. The film tells the inspiring story of British farmers standing up against the industrial food system and transforming the way they produce food – to heal the soil, benefit our health and provide for local communities. Book a seat [here](#).
- Looking ahead to next month, there are glimmers of spring and longer days with the snowdrop festival at [The Manor of Dean](#) Tillington, Petworth. As part of the National Garden Scheme, there will be an open afternoon in the gardens on 2 February, with a chance to enjoy the early spring bulbs.
- Book a spot on one of the National Park’s Youth Action Days! Are you aged 16-25 (or know someone who might be interested) and want to make a difference to nature and the environment? We’re offering the chance to get involved with Steyning Downland Scheme, which is working towards improving biodiversity and improving accessibility. The fun volunteering day on 15 February is FREE to join and a great chance to add to your CV! [Find out more here](#).

Pic credits

P3 Dark Skies - Lorcan Taylor-Hood; P6 left Sarah Womersley; P7 right Jake Eastham